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Children's Health and Cognitive Growth in Diverse Latino Communities

We know that biological mechanisms, conditioned by the mother's social environment, affect the health status of infants and toddlers. Earlier work focusing on birth outcomes and the health of young Latino children posits an *epidemiological paradox*, whereby their status is comparable to children of middle-class white populations, despite large gaps in socioeconomic status. At the same time, a *cognitive-developmental paradox* also exists: the apparently robust health of Latino infants and toddlers does not necessarily translate into stronger cognitive skills emerging in the preschool period.

Drawing on a national sample of about 10,700 infants (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study birth cohort), we report on children's health and cognitive outcomes at birth, 9, and 24 months of age among ethnic groups. We find that Latino mothers, especially those who are *less* acculturated, are less likely to bear premature or low birth-weight infants, compared with mothers of comparable social class, after taking into account (1) proximal biological factors, such as the mother's health practices, (2) the mother's intentionality regarding the pregnancy and in raising the child, (3) maternal practices and the quality of social relationships, and (4) the family's demographic structure, especially the ratio of children to adults in the household.

By 9 and 24-months of age, however, this Latino advantage largely fades, and children from Mexican-heritage families display lower health indicators (on some measures) and lower levels of communication, task responsiveness, and cognitive proficiencies, compared with white children. The four sets of covariates capture attributes of Latina mothers and families that help to explain the epidemiological paradox.